

# Improving Your Garden Soil

If you have a vegetable garden, you cannot have too much organic matter and if you garden organically, without relying on chemicals, this will be even more the case. Organic matter when dug into the soil provides several benefits:

- It improves any soil, opening up heavy clay soils and binding free-draining sandy soils.
- Organic matter provides food for soil organisms, which in turn increases the fertility of the soil.
- It holds moisture in the soil, making it available to the plants.
- As it breaks down gradually, it will release nutrients that can be used by the plants, and it will moderate the pH by acting as a buffer.

Used as mulch, organic matter has several advantages:

- It prevents weed seeds in the soil from germinating and competing with crops.
- It will prevent moisture from evaporating from the soil.
- A mulch acts as an insulator, maintaining an even soil temperature when the air temperature is too hot or cold or fluctuates wildly between day and night.

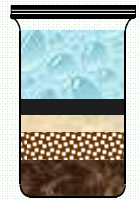
**Granite Soils:** Should contain at least 50% organic matter

**Clay Soils:** Should contain at least 1/3 organic matter

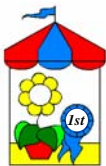


## Cool Tip:

Not sure just what kind of soil you have? Here is an easy way to tell: Take a glass jar that has a lid and fill it half way with your soil. Then fill it the rest of the way with water leaving a little bit of space at the top. Put the lid on and shake hard for a few minutes. Set it aside and let it settle for a couple of hours. Your soil will settle by layers giving you a good idea of how much sand, rock, clay and organic material you have.



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